



Joe Feddersen (Colville Confederated Tribes) and Bill Ransom, *Bestiary*, 2002, book with woodcut and lithograph images, letterpress text, MAM Contemporary American Indian Art Collection, gift of Corwin Clairmont, copyright the artists, 2002.08.

This bound book features a colorful cloth cover with a butterfly, scorpion and other insects printed in black ink. Inside are five prints and five poems, each by one of 10 artists and writers, about various creatures: Rick Bartow (Mad River Band Wiyot), *Hawk* (image); Ken Brewer, *Sheep* (poem); Corwin Clairmont (Salish-Kootenai), *Red Mink* (image); Joe Feddersen (Colville Confederated Tribes), *Butterfly* (image); Samuel Green, *You Ask Me About Birds* (poem); Betty Moynahan (Choctaw), *Great Horned Owl* (image); Bill Ransom, *Slug* (poem); Gail Tremblay (Mi'kmaq and Onondaga), *To the Ghosts of Salmon* (poem); Elizabeth Woody (Navajo/Warm Springs/Wasco/Yakama), *June, In Red Willow and Cottonwood* (poems); and Melanie Yazzie (Diné), *Sol y Umbra* (image).

I am in love with so many pieces in the Contemporary American Indian Art Collection at the Missoula Art Museum that it was difficult for me to choose only one I wanted to write about. Then I noticed a work I knew well, a beautiful handmade book in the museum collection that Joe Feddersen, a printmaker and artist who is a descendant of the Okanagan and Lakes peoples and enrolled at the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, had created with his friend, Bill Ransom. Bill is a poet and fiction writer and the two of them team taught a 32 credit interdisciplinary program called “The Order of Things” at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington during the Fall quarter of 2001 and the Winter quarter of 2002.

Joe Feddersen is an amazingly talented printmaker and visual artist, and Bill Ransom, is a gifted poet who writes powerful short stories about the human condition, and wonderful science fiction novels. Students were excited to be mentored by the two of them, so they had a very enthusiastic group of hardworking students. During the 2nd quarter of the program, Joe and Bill felt inspired to put together a handmade book of their own. Feddersen invited a group of gifted Native American printmakers to send prints, and Ransom invited a group of poets that included two Native Americans, Elizabeth Woody and me, to write poems that became the contents of the book. They told each of the artists and poets to make a work about an animal or animals. Feddersen and Ransom also each did a work of their own for the book. Joe enlisted his friend Corwin (Corky) Clairmont to help him carve wonderful images of insects they printed on the beautifully colored printed papers he used on the covers and fly-leaves of each of the books. He printed the book title, *Bestiary*, in gold on the cover of each book. Even before readers open and begin to study the art and read the poems, they realize this book is special.

And then there is the art; each print is a sumptuous feast. All the book pages are 6¾ inches wide by 8⅜ inches tall, so all the artworks are intimate and made to be viewed close up. The first print is a linocut called “Hawk” by Rick Bartow, a gifted Wiyot artist whose grandfather walked north from Wiyot land in Loleta, California to find work in Southbeach, Oregon where Bartow grew up with friends from the Siletz reservation. Bartow’s work is printed, like all the pages in the book, on a creamy colored, off-white sheet of domestic etching paper. Bartow’s bird image has a distinctive character; its eyes are slightly unfocussed as though it is in some state between waking and sleeping. When I look at this image it seems to me as though this raptor is not looking for prey, but is in some kind of internal reverie where it is reflecting on the condition of this fragile world where all creatures are trying to survive. The ruffled feathers that extend down from its broad shoulders, and the condition of its long skinny bird legs, make me worry about how long, given the condition of our world. our habitat will sustain us or even such a wild and powerful creature as the hawk. Looking at Bartow’s vision of this bird makes me want to pray that the Earth will continue to support the lives of all her creatures.

The next print in the book, “Red Mink” by Corky Clairmont, from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation, is an image that documents what may be the most complex visual narrative in the book. While the central image pictured is the red mink, this exquisitely designed composition makes reference to a complex ecosystem in a land where three rivers meet before they flow into the headwaters of the

Missouri River. Corky makes visual references to salmon, buffalo tracks, and eagle feathers, bringing to mind creatures that are part of a rich environment that has long supported the lives of Indigenous people who have lived in that place. In turn, the presence of eagle feathers remind one of the ceremonies that Clairmont's ancestors performed to thank and bless all those places and creatures who made their lives good. Corky talks about travelling to a part of the territory his ancestors had used for generations and cared for, and prayed over long before the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition traveled to that sacred place and gave rivers, mountains, rock formations and features of the land foreign names. When he arrived at that place that his ancestors used to bless, he looked at that area where three rivers meet, and he felt the need to take out his eagle feathers and to pray and make an offering. When he began his prayer, a red mink came out to watch him, and it stayed, quietly listening, until he finished his prayer before it left. He was so moved by that moment that he chose to celebrate it by making this print about that moment of sacred sharing between an animal and a human who needed to maintain ancient indigenous relationships so the circle of things could continue to support life. Whenever I look at this print, and think about Corky Clairmont's story and his prayer, and the presence of that beautiful red mink, I feel perhaps humans can remember how to maintain balance with everything on this planet.

The third print in the book is Joe Feddersen's incredibly glamorous abstract butterfly design based on a butterfly pattern that is sometimes twined and sometimes coiled into Colville basketry. In his print, Joe used beautiful blended rolls in the two triangles whose narrow ends point down toward what would be the bottom of the basket if the design was twined or coiled one triangle above the other. In the bottom $\frac{3}{8}$ of the triangle, Feddersen used an aquamarine blue or turquoise ink which becomes a band of green as it blends with a line of sunburst yellow ink, At the broad top end of the bottom triangle, a thin strip of red-orange surmounts a blend of orange as it mixes with the golden yellow below it. The top of the bottom triangle literally glows. The bottom $\frac{3}{8}$ above the point of the top triangle is a dark red blended with a dark color that appears to be either a black or a very dark navy color that has the darkest purple/dark brown overtones where the colors blend in the middle $\frac{5}{8}$ of the triangle. The entire background that surrounds the two triangles with their bended rolls is covered by a sparkling layer of glitter some of which of mirrors the colors in the print. Joe Feddersen talks about how the abstract symbols in Colville Basketry are often like glyphs, and sometime those patterns will bring whole stories to mind. When that is true, the print becomes a kind of mnemonic object that uses abstract design to transmit cultural knowledge.

Betty Moynahan, a Choctaw, did the fourth print in the book. She called it, "Great Horned Owl." To produce her wonderful detailed image, she made a linocut using a process called a four-color reduction print, by cutting a linoleum block. Printing an edition in one color, cleaning the block, re-cutting it and using a brayer to ink the block with a second color, justifying each print in the edition and printing it again, and repeating the process two more times. This printing process allowed Moynahan to use five colors, the color of her sheet of paper, yellow, gray, light brown and black to create her wonderful image that focuses on the face and upper body of an owl which dramatically stares out at the viewer. She chose the owl because it has significant meaning to so many different Native peoples. For example, among Lakota, Omaha, Cheyenne, Cherokee and Creek peoples, owls are considered to be connected to spirits of the dead, and for many Dakota and Lakota particularly, the appearance of

an owl at one's tipi or house during the day can be a sign that some person in the family has died or is about to die. However, among the Oglala, the Great Horned Owl, in particular can be associated with traditional Lakota healers who learn about the uses of herbal medicines from bears.

The final print in the book is by Melanie Yazzie, the noted Navajo sculptor, painter and printmaker, For this art book, she created a print called "Sol y Umbra" (Sun and Shadow,) a linocut printed in black. The image is of two dogs, in different environments. The bottom image is of a black dog, mouth open and teeth showing, head turned enough so viewers can see both eyes. The environment around the dog is full of white lines. In the top half Of the image is a dog whose face is in profile. His teeth are smaller, but also prominent. And we see only one eye looking out sideways at us. The marking on the dog's body seem to indicate he has curly hair and is not black, and this dog stands against a black background. Along the top of the print plant forms grow down, and from the bottom of the print the plant forms grow up. Along the right side of the print there appears to be four glyph-like forms, and at least two seem to make references to rain. The images of the dogs seem playful, and the title makes the image feel like a metaphor. Whenever I look at them, I feel delighted.

Every time I look at this art book, I fall in love again. I am so glad that Joe Feddersen and Bill Ransom decided to make an edition of 26 copies and 20 artist's proofs of this book, and to give me one of the 20 artist proofs they made. I am glad to know that the Missoula Art Museum has a copy of this beautifully made work of art.

Affectionately,
Gail Tremblay
Spring 2021